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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

Spirituality and Sexuality (Supplemental)

Authenticity

Betty Brody

*Sing your own song! Dance your own dance!
Now is your time. Now is your chance.*

*Never before or again will you this way appear,
Your unique gifts to bring. Let your Essence be clear.*

*Be yourself with your Own thoughts and feelings.
Follow your heart to its Own meaning.*

*Never mind the crowds, copying the days' trends.
Sing from Your heart until your days end.*

*Being truly me allows you to be honest too.
All that I desire for you is that you grow into YOU.*

*We watch each other grow, all expectations put aside.
As we connect with each other, we connect to SELF inside.*

*Allow others their own paths. Love them as they are.
Each of us is self-responsible, near to our paths or far.*

*Each of us is right on schedule. The Universe is so wise.
Bless, not judge our friends, there is more here than we can surmise.*

*Make room in your heart for ALL of your life.
With YOU in your heart there is no cause for strife.*

*Forgive yourself, feel your heart expand.
Forgive all others, welcome peace to the land.*

*We are all children of the same God,
Lost sisters and brothers to lay in the same sod.*

*Home to our Mother who sees with impunity,
Overlooking our differences, celebrates our Unity.*

From the Editors:

Love is the highest form of sexuality, whether it be expressed as love of God or of another person. The authors in this issue bring all of themselves, including their sexuality, into relationship with Spirit.

Betty Brody and Judy
Lumb

Betty Brody is a member of Alexandria Friends Meeting in Virginia, but for seven years has been sojourning at Sandy Spring Friends Meeting in Sandy Spring, Maryland. She is an alumna of The School of the Spirit, a spiritual director, and she and her husband are residents in the Friends House Retirement Community in Sandy Spring. She enjoys playing in a recorder trio, singing in two choirs and creating non-functional clay sculptures.

How Do I Know Which Is God?

Mariellen Gilpin

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS) is an independent publication co-operatively produced by Friends with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Muriel Dimock, Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Pamela Richards, Earl Smith, and Eleanor Warnock.

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In 1978, at the age of 38, I was admitted to the psychiatric ward of the local hospital: I was hearing voices, some of which I took to be God. The only treatment available in that time and place was medication, which made it easier to be sane, but left me barely able to stand, let alone walk or think. I was assigned two labels: schizophrenia and bipolar mood disorder. Nobody in the caring professions asked me what I thought was going on. I thought I was crazy—I was a creature of my culture. I wanted to get well, and so read what I could about the two labels; neither one really fit. I didn't get better—I hallucinated just as often. Therapists recommended even more pills. I knew I needed a different kind of therapist. No other kind was available in those years—except God. God took on my case.

My culture did not prepare me, or my medical helpers, to understand the needs of a mystical person:

When one prays deeply, God/the Universe/the Source of All may direct a flow of energy through the praying person's chakras, which the person in prayer may offer to serve someone's needs. Any chakra may receive the Flow; with a strong Flow, any chakra may come to orgasm. When the Flow is directed to one's sexual organs, sexual ecstasy may result. The Flow, however, may be a positive or negative force, depending on the intention of the person in prayer. A positive intention, for instance, might be expressed in an open-ended way: "May the needs of the loved one be met, according to Thy will." Or, the intention may be negative, as in, "May this person meet my needs." Thus, the Flow of energy directed to a chakra may be either positive or negative.

Since being human often means having both beneficent and ego-laden intentions all tangled up together, one may unintentionally be praying something to the effect of "I want the best for this person because I *need* him or her to be well and happy." With the best of intentions, the Flow may not be entirely positive with a very unhappy individual who has power issues. On the other hand, the Flow may be largely negative, both in intent and in outcome. In my experience, thus, I have come to recognize that there is positive prayer and negative prayer, and the extent to which the praying person's ego is in charge is the extent to which prayers may be negative.

Unbeknownst to me, a sorcerer had entered my life shortly before I was diagnosed. Sorcerers are those who engage in negative prayer and use the power of suggestion to control or influence another's actions. In my experience, a sorcerer is someone with deep power issues, whose childhood was so abusive physically, emotionally and sexually as to terrorize and disempower the child. Such a child may become so manipulative, angry and scared that he or she chooses sorcery to get what s/he wants. Supplementing intentions with simple, innocuous-appearing materials like a length of cord or a needle and thread, the sorcerer tries to control another's actions to his or her own advantage. The sorcerer in this case used negative prayer with the aid of his ritually-imbued tools to have sex with me. Not sex in person, but in spirit.

A sexual response during prayer may be a precious reality, one inspiring a deeply loving and intimate relationship with the Divine, or on the other hand, it may be destructive of mind,

body, and spirit—not only of the object of such negative prayer but also of the perpetrator of spiritual abuse. I have experienced both kinds of relationships—and in addition to sexually abusing me, the sorcerer sometimes impersonated God to get his way. Imagine my confusion.

Once God took on my case, I came to understand that what I originally thought was the source of my experiences—a sorcerer, a human I knew who lived several states away at the time—was actually the perpetrator. He had made me his sexual slave. It took the real God some years to convince me of the deception.

Then, once I had the right frame of reference for my experiences, God worked faithfully with me to free me—seventeen years after the original medical labeling process—from the sorcerer’s grasp. Then, God worked another seventeen years with me, to heal from those experiences. I got slowly but steadily better, still taking a full medication regimen. Having helped me to normalcy by the standards of our culture, God did not stop there. God taught me that a sexual response in a state of deep prayer is a literal and very precious reality. Mystics and saints like Teresa of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen, who spoke of divine union, were not speaking metaphorically.

My life has been the way into and out of bondage; the way back to functionality and indeed to wholeness; and then beyond wholeness to unitive experiences with God. I no longer have any need for antipsychotic medications; however, it has become clear that I still need some medication for mood swings. For the sake of however many sufferers from sorcery there may be in our current society, and for therapists who want to help such patients heal, I offer some questions and some reflections based on my experiences: If I had it all to do over again, what guidelines

would I use to distinguish between the sorcerer, that is to say, a human whom I shall call “Spirit Lover”—and God, whom I choose to call “Holy Spirit Lover”? Further, I hope to help others decide what choice is in their own best interest.

In the next section I will consistently use the male pronouns because that is my experience, both with God and with Spirit Lover. I am sure the selfsame phenomena could feel like a female presence to a heterosexual male. God is both—and neither—and more. Since I am basing this chapter entirely on my own experience, I choose the male pronouns. I list the queries below, and then will discuss them one by one:

Queries for Distinguishing between God and an Imposter

- 1) *Which chakras are the primary focus of my lover’s attention?*
- 2) *Does my partner seem to think it important to gain my consent each time we have sex? How is that consent gained?*
- 3) *Is the partner’s primary focus on connection or disconnection with me as a whole person?*
- 4) *Does the partner encourage or discourage my codependent behaviors?*
- 5) *To what extent is my trust in my partner well-placed?*

1) Which chakras are the primary focus of my lover’s attention?

In my experience, the Spirit Lover was primarily focused on sex, that is to say, my gonads. There was some very secondary interest in my heart-chakra, and a very minimal interest in my solar plexus. My crown and third eye were of no interest. With respect to other parts of my body, he had some

interest in my bowels, as well—more about that later. His first manifestation to me as an entity was an approach to my vagina.

By contrast, Holy Spirit Lover’s first manifestation was focused on my solar plexus and crown. Two years later, he moved to my heart and gonads, with continued primary attention to crown and solar plexus. After another year, his attention moved to include the third eye. Because Spirit Lover wounded my heart chakra, Holy Spirit’s approach to my heart chakra was very gentle and gradual, slowly gaining my trust at each stage of increasing intimacy. Holy Spirit Lover was just as interested in union-to-orgasm with all chakras. With respect to interest in union with the rest of my body, so far there has been no interest in my bowels, but in the last year, unitive experiences that include the whole ribcage and my breasts have become fairly regular.

I do not rule out the possibility that God may be interested in union that includes my bowels as well, but if so, I will not be surprised if God will work to heal bowel-wounds as part of my growing into that fuller union. With the benefit of hindsight, I recognize that Spirit Lover’s interest in my bowels was for the purpose of stealing their energy for himself. He was bisexual, and increased pleasure in bowel-sex with his other partners was probably his entire interest in my bowels.

2) Does my partner seem to think it important to gain my consent each time we have a unitive experience? How is that consent gained?

Spirit Lover worked for consent the first time, but assumed it forever afterwards. Often I woke up from a sound sleep with a penis already in my vagina. “I have a headache tonight” was never an option for me. The goal was sex on his terms, always. The

night we first had sex, much of his time and focus was on weaving a web around me, a web that I later came to realize removed my power to consent to having sex.

It is my understanding, by contrast, that Holy Spirit Lover's goal in a unitive experience is to pray through and with me, and if I am tired and need sleep, God chooses to pray through me while I sleep—intensity of sexual union intensifies the depth of the prayer-state, but union of intention toward those being prayed for goes on, sexual pleasure or no sexual pleasure. At no point have I had any sense that God has woven a web or removed my power to consent—to have free will. We are equals in deciding whether and when to have sex. Always.

3) Is my partner's focus primarily on connection or disconnection with me as a person?

It is easy for me to care about and have deep feelings of connection with someone I have sex with. Spirit Lover always seemed glad that I connected with him emotionally, but there were many signs that he had no deep emotional connection with me. Mutuality of caring turned out not to be an option for him. When I say he did not care, I am speaking of a pattern of choices on his part not to be considerate of me. For example, the many times I woke up already having sex: my obvious need for sleep was not a sufficient reason not to have sex with me at that time. Over time, he learned to ask first, but having my sleep disturbed several times each night by him asking again and again did not suggest a deep change in his caring for anything but himself. I came to understand over time that his interest was in sex, and only secondarily in me. His focus was on sex as a

self-medication for feelings of anxiety, un-self-worth, and powerlessness that emanated from him constantly. His need to assuage those unpleasant feelings was so intense that he could not care about anything, or anybody, else.

Holy Spirit Lover, by contrast, cares about me and my needs. There is no sense of anxiety when God seeks unity with me, no sense that he will feel less worthy or less powerful if I don't have sex with him. Sex or no sex, God's focus is on love for me as a whole person, not on feeding his own ego. He wants my love, yes, and he wants me to put my love for him into all my behavior choices, not just my sexual choices. God's love for me is God's first priority in our relationship—God's sense of what I need may well be different than my view of what I need in the short run. But no matter what toil or trouble I may face, God is my loving and ever-present companion. *In sickness and in health; for richer, for poorer:* God walks beside me and loves me; he does not abandon me, emotionally or practically.

4) Does my partner encourage or discourage my being codependent?

For example, surviving childhood for me was a matter of assuaging my mother's anxiety, of keeping her as stable as I could—for my own well-being. I was sexually attracted to Spirit Lover, who was also desperately anxious. Medicating his anxiety by having sex with him was a natural (if shortsighted) choice for me to make, one which he encouraged, but which was quite crazy-making.

Holy Spirit Lover, on the other hand, does not encourage me to have sex simply to be nice to him. He is not anxious, not in need of being stabilized emotionally, not in need of me

keeping him comfortable. Whatever the reader's form of codependency happens to be, God will not encourage that behavior. We are free to let go of those behaviors we learned in order to survive childhood. God enjoys and rewards us when we choose to be more whole as a result of his loving presence: I have learned that when I make a better choice anywhere in my life, God is more likely to offer sexual union.

5) To what extent is my trust in my partner well-placed?

Both Spirit Lover and Holy Spirit Lover behave in highly patterned ways. In my experience, Spirit Lover could be expected to be anxious, to seek control over others rather than himself, to put his needs before another's. He lied, was manipulative, and quick to express anger if he knew he had the advantage.

Holy Spirit Lover, on the other hand, has the advantage and uses it to help me choose to be more whole, to grow in depth of character. He is not anxious, has full control over his actions, and a sense of what the real long-term priorities in our relationship need to be. His needs are met, so his focus is on whatever my real need might be—beyond my own short-term perspective of my needs. He is Truth, always makes it clear I have free will, never guilts or bullies me into doing things his way. I always get to choose. Because God loves me, I have learned that loving God is a matter of loving myself better.

Given these two persons as potential lovers, which would you trust? Which would you decide to commit your life to loving and serving and pleasing the very best you could? Which relationship is more likely to bring you to wholeness?

Mariellen Gipin is a member of Champaign IL Friends Meeting and one of WCTS Editors.

When Sexuality and Spirituality Are in Conflict

Betty Brody

A few years ago, I experienced my deepest depression, caused by my conflict between spiritual teachers and my own inner teacher. My Indian teacher advised me that I would not be able to continue to receive his teachings if I acted on my bi-sexuality. I shared with him that I had been in love with a woman. He said I would need to remain celibate in my relationships with other women. Although I have been married for 31 years and remained faithful to my husband, it still feels important for me to acknowledge and own that I have the capacity to also love people of my own sex. To disclaim this aspect of myself would feel like cleaving myself in two. I need to own all aspects of myself and bring them to my relationship with God.

I searched for other teachers with Indian lineages who would accept my bisexuality, and found none. This did not feel right to me, so I continued to search for my Inner Teacher, who accepts me as I was created by my Mother-Father God.

I am wondering if some spiritual teachings are so intertwined with cultural norms that they cannot be easily separated by those who espouse them. Surely God would not create individuals with different ways of expressing their sexuality only to condemn them for these differences and

withhold his love and the possibility of spiritual development from them!

I heard the top Western disciple of Mother Meera speak about having to leave her, after he shared that he was planning to marry another man. Mother Meera gave him the choice of continuing to be her disciple or leaving her to marry his partner. He chose to leave her.

I'm wondering about the effect of suppressed sexuality. Is this why so many priests are involved in sexual abuse of young boys? They take vows of celibacy and have no sexual outlets. Would it not be better for priests and nuns to be allowed to marry?

Spiritual growth can cause heightened experience of sexuality. I know this from my own experience. I was on the verge of a sexual climax for weeks, when I lived in Ukraine, following two acupuncture treatments. This was relieved by sexual intercourse with my husband. How would I have handled this had I previously taken celibacy vows, prohibiting sexual release?

It was during this time that I sought counselling with Connie Zweig, the author of *The Holy Longing: Spiritual Yearning and the Shadow Side*. We did phone counselling once a week for about six months, while I journaled intensively. The acupuncture had brought to the fore an extremely strong sexual attraction to my female acupuncturist, who became a dear friend. Although the emotions were intense, I did not act on them. With the wisdom of retrospective vision, I can see clearly that leaving my husband and joining my acupuncturist would not have been the best path for any of us.

It is possible for sexuality to be a spiritual practice. This is called Tantra. I had once known a Buddhist nun who married a Buddhist monk so they could use Tantra as their major spiritual practice..

It seems to me that it is love that binds together sexuality and spirituality. That is, love of self, love of God and love of the other.

At its best, sexuality is a gift to be shared with those we love. I agree with the marriage vows which say: "with my body, I thee worship." Could it also be said that in worshipping a loving partner, we are also worshipping God? Is not union with God the ultimate goal of spiritual development?

Years ago, when I was a hospice nurse, one of my patients whispered in my ear, just before she breathed her last breath: "we are all one spirit"! She had a radiant smile on her face as she related her new discovery to me. This statement was especially poignant to me as this patient was Jewish and agnostic.

A Psalm for My Love

Mariellen Gilpin

*My love,
When you are near I do not want.
(I want your nearness.)
Lying down with you is lying down in green
pastures.
(I want to be thy green pasture.)
My soul is restored when you are near.
(My soul is restored knowing your soul is
restored by my nearness.)
Thy rod comforteth me.
(Let me comfort thy rod.)
Surely goodness and mercy follow me
because you are near.
(Let me follow you with goodness and
mercy all the days of my life.)
And let me dwell in thy house, my love.
(I want you to dwell in my house forever.)*

Book Review: *Stories of Spiritual Transformation*

Joan Shivarpita Harrigan, 2017 *Stories of Spiritual Transformation – The Fulfillment of Kundalini Process-Modern Seekers, Ancient Teachings*, Knoxville, Tennessee: Shakti Press, 517 pages. Reviewed by Betty Brody

Do you have an intense desire to have a relationship with the Divine? This book may help you. You may be experiencing Kundalini rising.

The book begins with a very well-illustrated section, describing the types of kundalini risings, which means that a person is in an active process of spiritual development. Kundalini means the Divine within or the Holy Spirit.

According to Harrigan, “A person with Kundalini process can feel the action of the vayus (prana function) and is more aware of the workings of the mind. These individuals tend to be more intelligent, sensitive, and creative than non-process people and seem to have something a bit extra or special. It is their life task to sincerely support, cultivate, and nurture this sacred endeavor. The book of Isaiah lists seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are the results of a complete Kundalini process. These are wisdom, understanding, discernment, perseverance, knowledge, reverence, and awe.”

Harrigan’s life work is devoted to accurately conveying Kundalini Vidya, a sacred science based in the Vedic tradition of India in a way that Western students can understand and use for their spiritual benefit. In the book she shares spiritual transformation stories from 20 of her spiritual consultees in their own words. These stories illustrate several different pathways that Kundalini can take, culminating in self-realization. Each

story is followed by a commentary from Harrigan and her teacher, Swami Chandrasekharanand Saraswati, which elucidates its most significant features.

Harrigan states, “Kundalini Shakti’s purpose is ultimately that of saint maker. She is the inner guru who inspires and guides the seeker to Self-Illumination, to oneness with the One. She is loving yet relentless in her mission to evolve us into spiritual beings. She is the wise counsel, inspiring guide, and peaceful presence that is Love and Truth itself.”

As a one of Harrigan’s former spiritual directees, I found reading the 20 stories from other directees particularly fascinating. She was my spiritual director for six years

and was very helpful in guiding me from blocked kundalini rising to an open rising through annual retreats at PKYC, monthly phone consultations, and prescribed yoga asanas, mudras and mantras.

Harrigan states: “Kundalini Shakti’s purpose is ultimately that of saint maker. She is the inner guru who inspires and guides the seeker to Self-Illumination, to oneness with the One. She is loving yet relentless in her mission to evolve us into spiritual beings. She is the wise counsel, inspiring guide, and peaceful presence that is Love and Truth itself.”

If you wish to learn more about PKYC, you can go to their website. <kundalinicare.com>.

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February 2018
Nudges
Editor: **Earl Smith**

“Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.” (*Quaker Faith and Practice, Britain Yearly Meeting, 1955*). How has God been nudging you into faithfulness? Did you write a letter after days of uneasiness and find it changed the debate? Did you “happen” to call a friend just when she needed you? God is ever guiding us—what nudges have you experienced?

Deadline: November 15, 2017

May 2018
Other Lives
Editor: **Rhonda Ashurst
with Judy Lumb**

Do you sense you had an earlier life—perhaps a dream set in another time and place, in which you are someone else? Have you met someone, or been in a place or a culture, unfamiliar and yet eerily familiar? Have you experienced yourself in another lifetime, another personality? Is there work in this life that began in an earlier life? Is your work now enhanced (or not) by your sense of an unfinished task from that earlier life?

Deadline: February 15, 2018

August 2018
Angry with God
Editor: **Mike Resman**

“The arrows of the Almighty find their mark in me, and their poison soaks into my spirit. God’s onslaughts wear me away. ... Oh how shall I find help within myself? The power to help myself is out of my reach.” —Job 6: 4,13

Have you been angry with God? Why did you become angry with God? How was your anger with God resolved? How has your anger with God altered your spiritual experience? Have you been able to let go of your anger with God? What has helped you do that?

Deadline: May 15, 2018

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